

What is claimed is:

1. A safety stopper for use with a welding torch striker, the striker having a substantially U-shaped spring handle, the spring handle defining a first arm with a first push-tab and a second arm with a second push-tab, the arms joined to form a bend at a proximal end of the striker, at least one flint mounted to a distal end of the first arm, and a strike plate mounted to a distal end of the second arm, the spring handle and the strike plate defining an open area, the safety stopper comprising:  
a cover shaped to cover a substantial portion of the open area, and shaped to expose the strike plate and the at least one flint; and  
attachment means for attaching the cover to the striker such that the safety stopper, when attached to the striker, defines a clear path for movement of a first push-tab with respect to a second push-tab;  
such that when the striker, with the safety stopper attached, is carried hands-free attached to an operator's belt, the safety stopper reduces the chances of the operator being thrown off balance by the striker catching on an external object.
2. A safety stopper according to claim 1, wherein the cover is a sleeve made of a flexible, non-flammable, heat-resistant material.
3. A safety stopper according to claim 2, wherein the attachment means includes a sleeve shaped and sized to hold the safety stopper by spring force exerted outward on the sleeve by the first and second arms.
4. A safety stopper according to claim 3 wherein said sleeve includes a single sheet folded to produce a fold and first and second facing open edges, the first and second facing open edges attached by stitching.
5. A safety stopper according to claim 2, wherein the sleeve is made of leather.
6. A safety stopper according to claim 1, wherein the bend at the proximal end of the striker protrudes beyond the proximal end of the safety stopper
7. A safety stopper according to claim 1, wherein the cover is shaped as a sock and is made of a flexible, non-flammable, heat-resistant material.
8. A safety stopper according to claim 7, wherein the attachment means includes a grommet penetrating the sock within the bend near the sock's closed proximal end.

9. A safety stopper according to claim 8, wherein the attachment means includes at least one rivet penetrating the sock near the sock's distal open end.
10. A safety stopper according to claim 1, wherein the cover includes a rigid plate made of a non-flammable, heat-resistant material.
11. A safety stopper according to claim 10, wherein the attachment means includes at least one clip-on fastener adapted to clip the rigid plate to a portion of the spring handle proximate to the bend.
12. A safety stopper according to claim 11, wherein the attachment means includes two clip-on fasteners.
13. A safety stopper according to claim 10, wherein the rigid plate includes at least one peripheral groove on along its first long edge.
14. A safety stopper according to claim 13, wherein a portion of the peripheral groove is adapted to secure the proximal end of the rigid plate within the bend of the striker.
15. A safety stopper according to claim 13, wherein the rigid plate includes an overlapping portion along its second long edge.
16. A safety stopper according to claim 10, wherein the cover includes two rigid plates configured for clamp-on attachment of the plates to the striker.
17. A safety stopper according to claim 16, wherein the cover includes a first rigid plate having at least one integral spacer and a second rigid plate having at least one socket sized to accept the at least one integral spacer.
18. A safety stopper according to claim 10, wherein the cover is a rigid metallic cover in sliding, overlapping relationship to the first swinging arm, and the attachment means includes tack-welds attaching the metallic cover to the second arm.
19. A safety stopper for use with a hand tool defining an open area, the safety stopper comprising, in combination, a cover shaped to cover a substantial portion of the open area and shaped to expose an active component of the tool; and attachment means for attaching the cover to the tool; such that the safety stopper when attached to the tool defines a clear path for movement of a trigger component of the tool; and such that when the tool with the safety stopper attached is carried hands-free attached to an operator's belt, the safety stopper reduces the chances of the operator being thrown off balance by the tool catching on an external object.

20. A safety striker, comprising:
  - a substantially U-shaped spring handle, the spring handle defining a first arm with a first push-tab and a second arm with a second push-tab, the arms joined to form a bend at a proximal end of the striker;
  - at least one flint mounted to a distal end of the first arm;
  - a strike plate mounted to a distal end of the second arm, the spring handle and the strike plate defining an open area; and
  - a safety stopper including a cover having a tough outer face, the cover configured to cover a substantial portion of the open area such that when an operator is carrying the striker hands-free with the striker attached to the operator's belt, and such that the cover reduces the chances of the striker catching on an external object.
21. A safety striker according to claim 20, wherein the cover is shaped as a sock and wherein the attachment means includes a grommet penetrating the sock within the bend near the sock's closed proximal end.
22. A safety striker according to claim 20, wherein the cover includes a substantially flat, rigid cover attached to one arm and oriented for motion in a plane parallel to the plane of the two arms.